

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SSB 6775

As Reported by House Committee On:
Technology, Energy & Communications

Title: An act relating to addressing the digital literacy and technology training needs of low-income and underserved areas through state support of community technology programs.

Brief Description: Addressing the digital literacy and technology training needs of low-income and underserved areas through state support of community technology programs.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Kauffman, Kilmer, Shin, Kastama, Franklin, Kohl-Welles and Rasmussen).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Technology, Energy & Communications: 2/20/08 [DP].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Creates the Community Technology Opportunity Program at Washington State University.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, ENERGY & COMMUNICATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives McCoy, Chair; Eddy, Vice Chair; Crouse, Ranking Minority Member; McCune, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hankins, Herrera, Hudgins, Hurst, Kelley, Morris, Takko and Van De Wege.

Staff: Kara Durbin (786-7133).

Background:

The Washington State University Center to Bridge the Digital Divide (Center) was established in 2001 as an outreach organization by the Washington State University Extension. The Center's stated purpose is to help underserved populations improve their quality of life using information technology.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The term "community technology" is broadly described as programs engaged in diffusing information and communications technology in local communities, often in underserved areas.

A 2007 University of Washington telephone survey cited several benefits for users of community technology programs, including employment benefits, economic benefits, and academic skills and literacy. The survey also cited several barriers to the success of community technology programs, including inadequate staffing or instructors, funding issues, and insufficient space and equipment.

Summary of Bill:

The Community Technology Opportunity Program (Program) is created. The Program must be administered by the Washington State University Extension. The Program Administrator must provide organizational, capacity building, and fund-raising support for community technology programs in the state.

A minimum of 75 percent of the Program's funds must be distributed through a competitive grant program. Grants are to be used by community technology programs to provide training; assistance in the use of information and communications technologies among low-income and underserved residents; and other information technology related equipment and services.

In order to apply for a grant, an applicant must:

- provide evidence that the applicant is a non-profit organization or a public entity working with a non-profit organization;
- define the geographic area or population to be served;
- include a needs assessment;
- specify the strategy for addressing the needs identified and an implementation plan;
- provide evidence of matching funds and resources; and
- provide evidence that funding will be used to provide effective delivery of community technology services.

The Program Administrator must: (1) establish expected Program outcomes for each grant recipient; and (2) require each grant recipient to provide an annual accounting of Program outcomes.

The Washington Community Technology Opportunity Account (Account) is created. Funds in the Account may only be used for the operation of the Community Technology Opportunity Program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Revised fiscal note requested on February 18, 2008.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Community technology programs provide a wonderful benefit to our communities. Currently, these programs are mainly driven by corporate donations. We want to expand these opportunities for low-income, underserved, and disabled populations of our state. Access to technology is important. In a global economy that is increasingly dependent on technology, we do not want to leave the disabled and disadvantaged populations behind. The need for these programs is much greater than what can be supported by existing funds. It is often hard to find funding for technology services in underserved areas. People with disabilities are often viewed in terms of their limitations, rather than their potential contributions. This bill could open up a world of opportunities to disabled persons. We need a technology literate work force. Community technology programs have helped more than one million citizens in this state.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Kauffman, prime sponsor; Lew McMurrin, Washington Technology Industry Association; Karen Manuel, Puget Sound Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology; Teresa Atkinson, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Mike Corsini, STAR Center; Tomas Corsini, Digital Promise; Peter Gruenbaum, Red Llama; David Keyes, City of Seattle; and Betty Buckley, Stone Soup.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.